

UC-NRLF



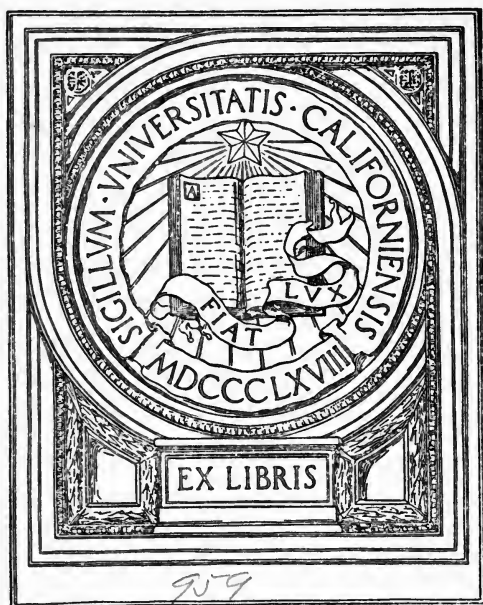
\$B 115 206

# JOSHUA TREES

FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP

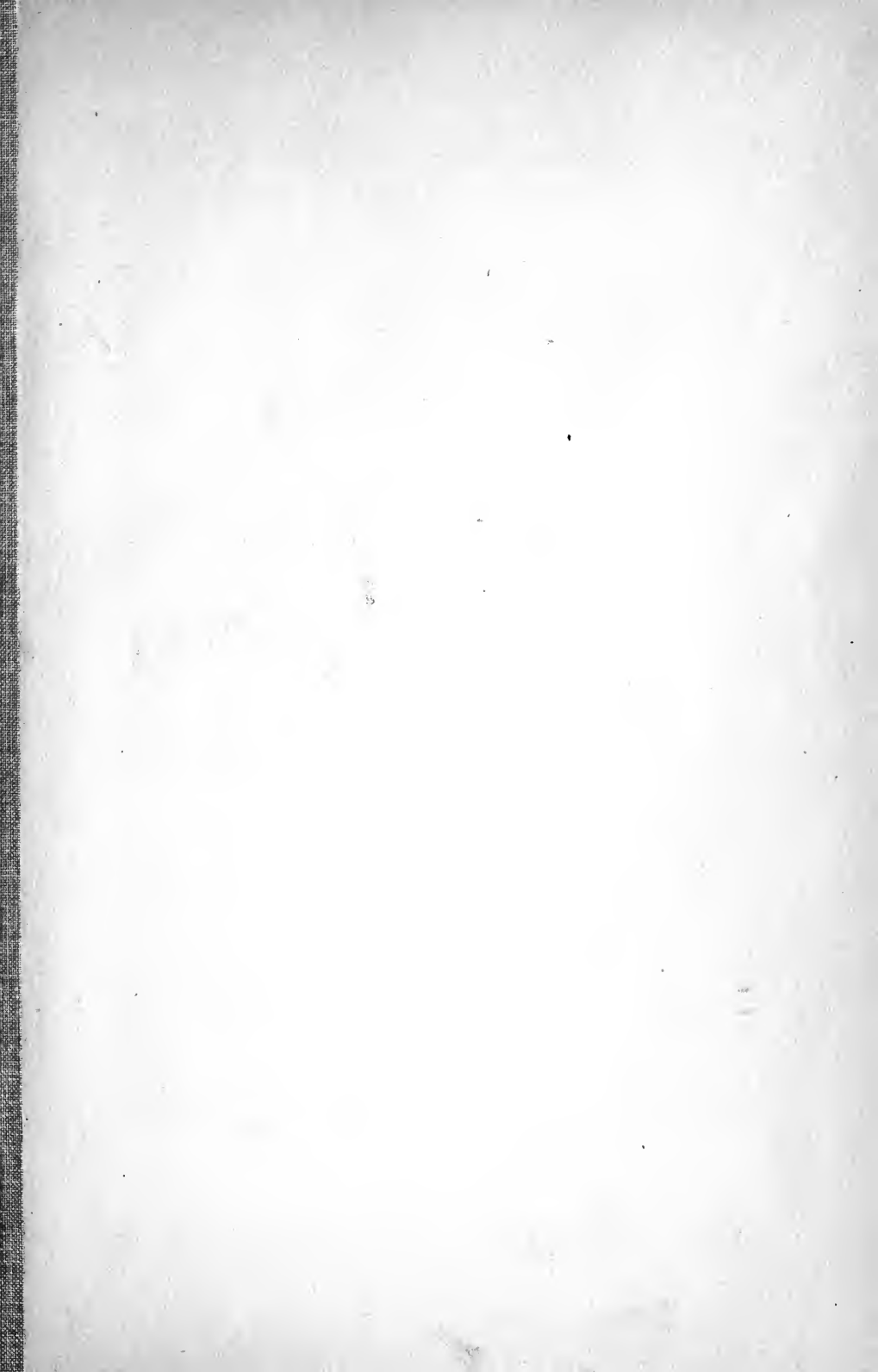
# CHAUNCEY WETMORE WELLS

1872-1933



This book belonged to Chauncey Wetmore Wells. He taught in Yale College, of which he was a graduate, from 1897 to 1901, and from 1901 to 1933 at this University.

Chauncey Wells was, essentially, a scholar. The range of his reading was wide, the breadth of his literary sympathy as uncommon as the breadth of his human sympathy. He was less concerned with the collection of facts than with meditation upon their significance. His distinctive power lay in his ability to give to his students a subtle perception of the inner implications of form, of manners, of taste, of the really disciplined and discriminating mind. And this perception appeared not only in his thinking and teaching but also in all his relations with books and with men.





## **JOSHUA TREES**



# JOSHUA TREES

BY

FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP



THE  
MARSHALL JONES COMPANY

BOSTON  
MARSHALL JONES COMPANY

1922

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

---

POETRY

On the Overland  
New York and Other Verses

PROSE

Les dessins de Pontormo  
Jacopo Carucci  
History of 17th Aero Squadron.

IN MEMORIAM

TO THE  
G. W. Wells  
AUTHOR OF  
THE HISTORY OF THE 17TH AERO SQUADRON

COPYRIGHT, 1922, BY  
MARSHALL JONES COMPANY  
Printed in the United States of America



953  
C589  
j

# CONTENTS

	PAGE
BLOOM ON THE DESERT'S EDGE . . . . .	3
ARCHEOLOGY . . . . .	4
STILL LIFE . . . . .	5
CONTACT . . . . .	6
VENETIAN GULLS . . . . .	7
THE MONKEY CAGE . . . . .	9
CALIFORNIA: THE HILLS OF BOLINAS . . . . .	11
CRUCIFIXION . . . . .	12
ARIZONA . . . . .	13
REVULSION . . . . .	14
CUCKOOS . . . . .	15
QUINCE BLOSSOMS . . . . .	16
LIGHT . . . . .	17
SURVIVALS . . . . .	18
ONCE MORE THE PATHÉTIQUE . . . . .	19
QUERY TO THE LORD OF LIGHT . . . . .	20
THE EXPLORER . . . . .	21
TO THE DISEMBODIED INTELLIGENCE . . . . .	23
A SPRING SONG FOR CALIFORNIA . . . . .	24
GRAMOPHONE SOLO . . . . .	25
. VERSUS . . . . .	26
A STYLIST . . . . .	27
REVOLUTIONARIES . . . . .	28
WINDLESS RAIN . . . . .	29
CIRCULAR FANS . . . . .	30
BYZANTINE MOSAICS . . . . .	31
POSTPONEMENT . . . . .	34
PEACE . . . . .	35
SUBURBAN TWILIGHT . . . . .	37
ANNOUNCING A DISSOLUTION SALE . . . . .	38
COSTA SCARPUCCIA . . . . .	39
REQUIEM . . . . .	41
OTHERNESS . . . . .	42
TO A BIVALVE . . . . .	43
MARIONETTES . . . . .	44
WORDS . . . . .	46



## JOSHUA TREES

---

### *Errata:*

*Page 24 line 23: "violent" should read "violet"*

*Page 26 line 19: a comma should follow "lacrymose"*

*Page 43 line 17: "breadth" should read "breath"*

---

---

## **JOSHUA TREES**



# BLOOM ON THE DESERT'S EDGE

DAWN inks in the saw-toothed foothills  
 against its nickel glare;  
 and, like the tail end of a flare,  
 a handful of stars  
 drag their light through the spikes of a Joshua tree  
 and sink out of sight.

Night flattens and thickens;  
 and noiselessly working,  
 like a mind full of dreams,  
 spectral exhalations  
 wind with wool  
 the acacias' fish-bone leaves.

Time heaves  
 and lies dead still  
 an instant's eternity.  
 Everything waits.  
 Everything listens.  
 Chill stillness fills  
 everything  
 like the shadow  
 of a great wing.

A patch of alkali glistens.

And fiercely the sun clears the foothills  
 and the sky is mercury  
 hissing with mirage where it eats into the land,  
 and the air is yellow with acacias in full bloom.

Napoleon's thoughts before Jena must have come like this.

## ARCHEOLOGY

CANGRANDE, Gran Podestade di Verona,  
they have pried up the lid of your sarcophagus  
because it is now the sixth centenary  
of your shabby friend Dante—  
you remember?—  
him whom Florence deported  
and who said he had walked through Hell  
yet found your stairs so steep.

And Cangrande you are a heap of musty rags  
to the camera's hard eye,  
a hunched muddle of rags and bones  
like the striker they potted on B Street,  
Tolusa,  
in a recent riot. . . .  
They photographed him too  
where he lay  
for the Sunday paper.

And they have taken out of your hawklike right hand  
your long sword of state,  
all jewels and fine gold,  
and put it into a glass box  
with a brief exact label—  
name and date,  
length and weight.

Ah, Cangrande di Verona,  
Grandissima Podestade!



## STILL LIFE

TO withdraw impassive upon myself  
until the scattered beady quicksilver of thought,  
mingling, make my consciousness a mirror  
where all things will enter, but none remain;

to assume my selfness completely  
by a contraction that envelops and yet rejects all  
otherness—  
this would be to become a flower.  
There is no other birth into perfection.

Anemones, black-hearted paper-fine anemones,  
I have found this out  
seeing your white, purple, red  
reflected in the untroubled reality  
of a looking-glass.

But what are you doing in this old bronze pot  
on my table?  
Your stems are as pale and sinuous as a shepherd's melody.  
Come, let us dance together;  
it is spring, and I have attended the obsequies  
of all my desires.

## CONTACT

A CRACKLING spark,  
ear-splitting, rips between the polished poles  
of your whining static machine,  
oscillating  
like a whipped rapier.

So we have rushed upon one another  
licking through the dry tension of emotion.

And the air stings and rings  
with the stimulation and clarity  
of ozone.  
We have rechemicalized  
the circumambient.

## VENETIAN GULLS

**T**O-DAY they have come in from the sea,  
the pearl-grey gulls with white throats, white tails,  
and wings edged with frills of foam.

The green canal water,  
harassed in its hunger for tranquillity  
by the worry and bubble of many oars and keels,  
lies fitted in between somnolent palaces  
like a finely chiseled pavement of Chinese jade.  
The hard oblique light falls clearer than flawless glass,  
cutting out pink roofs and high pink towers  
flat against the sky;  
and, wheeling and skimming through it,  
on wings frilled with the white of foam,  
pearl-grey gulls fly  
in straining, ascending and descending spirals,  
over green water irised into its depths  
with reflections of crumbling brick  
and age-ivoried marble.

Skimming, wheeling, wheeling, skimming, they fly  
over limpid jade-green water  
and its furling, unfurling, irised shadows  
that have rinsed out of the backward-slipping centuries  
insinuations of yellowing lace,  
purple figs,  
flaked gilt,  
pomegranates,  
and frost-flushed creeper leaves where summer still  
smoulders.

The gulls fly  
in parabolas and hyperbolas, ellipses and cycloids,  
flapping hungrily  
with a peevish sharp cry.

They swirl, sweeping past empty round-arched windows,  
empty gothic windows,  
empty flamboyant windows,  
and the rusty iron-work and lank slimy seaweed  
of water gates.

They swoop past rain-washed balustrades  
of porphyry balconies,  
squealing down on to floating shadows  
of delicate solemn palaces.

Dangling their red feet  
they swoop and hover over inverted shadowy palaces  
that melt and spread like heavy oils  
on the canal's deep green.

It is bitterly cold for early October  
and watching the gulls from my window  
I am filled with an imprisoned vague desolation.

Hungry intentions swirl through me  
in petulant spirals  
and flapping hyperbolas—  
unattained projects driven in, at the year's end,  
from sea beaches of life  
that free and changing tides have swept clean.

Improvident intentions veer about in me  
whirling whirring wings,  
as they settle down over lingering irised reflections in my  
mind  
of other men's delicate and solemn achievements.

The flawless light of Autumn's reality stares  
at a world narrowed to a prison,  
under this high pearl-grey layer of unbroken clouds,  
where the gulls peevishly crying  
have come in famished from the sea.

## THE MONKEY CAGE

THE mind seeks liberation  
but seeking grasps tighter the bars of incarnation  
staring into the misty hypothesis,  
and reality is a moment furtively lucid  
between dreams.  
(This is too technical.)

"Please do not feed or annoy the animals."

The mind seeks liberation,  
but few can make an exit unobserved,  
and the King of Dahomey  
has many spiritual relations  
who live in palaces of skulls.  
(This is too poetical.)

Give me strength on this foggy morning,  
when all the pyramidal pines are as flat and flimsy  
as black and white drop-curtains easy to lunge through,  
and the live oaks, hugging one another,  
are immense toadstools  
black-purple on the blue mist  
—nothing to knock over;  
give me strength to make something  
out of the ice-cold iron I have been tugging at.

Shall I twist it like a hairpin  
and make an instrument to measure a star?  
Shall I brain an enemy with it?  
Shall I flail out the seed of tribulation  
into penance and a slave's salvation?  
Or praise God on a vertical trapeze  
putting Swedish gymnastics into another dimension?

The spectators in sleazy bowler hats—  
white mouths and goggle eyes,

like codfish nosing about a tank—  
gulp each other's excrement,  
and gleefully flap about  
admiring my captive nudity.

## CALIFORNIA: THE HILLS OF BOLINAS

WIND racing inland  
pawing the sea into creeping scallops—  
heavy-winged, galloping wind,  
half horse, half bird—  
you bound  
and bump against the drooping belly of the clouds,  
you stumble  
scrambling inland into the steep Sierra.

And the yellow hills like heaps of half-empty balloons  
sag back from the beach in crumples,  
puff up in bulges,  
and shuddering drag at their moorings.

Wind out of Asia,  
why are your feet so fierce upon these hills?—  
you who have come from the Harp-playing Defile  
and tawny Omei-shan,  
you who have spoken to the pines of Miajima  
and counted the yellow nets  
on the beach at Suruga?

## CRUCIFIXION

### DISPASSIONATELY

I spit my thoughts like flies on a pin  
because by their buzzing they keep reminding me  
it was love, without which nothing lives,  
imprisoned me here  
that I might know how beautiful and all-merciful love is  
and how nothing matters but love—  
me nailed up, as a joke, high between  
sparkling Virgo and Sagittarius  
with the steady leaking and waste of my days  
dripping like water  
on to my skull.



## ARIZONA

**T**HESE wind-corroded mountains  
of malachite and steatite and azurite,  
of zinc and mica and feldspar,  
and dry as buried bones  
and arid as salt crystals in an oven—  
O holy land where nothing is that's holy,  
where nothing lives but mine prospectors' stakes,  
indulger and betrayer of passions  
withering and fierce as your sun. . . .  
Now grim John and his locusts are an unrolled scroll  
to me,  
and the Lamb of God, the Boddhi Tree and Mecca.  
Listen, there is something screaming  
like a scalded baby,  
listen, the desert jackal;  
and dawn whisks the crawling stars out of heaven  
like a scooping hand catching flies on an oil-cloth table.  
O Lamb of God,  
I am homesick, and men in their cities  
are less to me than tumble-weed  
bounding across the dry slime  
of dead lakes.  
The Lord will overwhelm their cities with sand;  
the true God will bury their cities  
utterly.  
But the flute and the drum  
and the masked dance of His ritual shall endure,  
His revelation shall endure like the mica and feldspar  
of these wind-corroded mountains;  
and it shall not be for nothing  
that more a friendless exile  
than once in Galilee or Araby  
He tramps about this country.

## REVULSION

THIS afternoon  
my life came out of its lurking place  
underground,  
its two-mouthed gopher hole,  
and squeaked at me.  
Looking up, with its tiny eyes  
beady and spiteful,  
it winced, it squeaked at me.

What am I?  
—the little, bare, rain-pitted mound  
nosed up at the mouth of its hole?

What am I?  
—the wind's erotic finger  
wound like an idiot girl's  
round a sun-stricken wild flower  
on its burrow's edge?

Or the rotting rain  
splitting open the toadstool  
of my knowledge  
and leaving it stinking and yellow?

But what does it matter what I think I am,  
or whether I made it  
or it made me,  
when my life has squeaked at me  
with spiteful eyes?

I know, I know. . . .  
It has nibbled in the dark  
the roots of bitter weeds.  
But then that is its nature.

I'll go and make friends  
with the porcelain-faced odalisque  
who grins shoving out butter pats  
in Boos Bros.' cafeteria.

## CUCKOOS

PEOPLE of parchment in beautiful villas,  
your gardens' light and shade  
plays at chess with the sun;  
and on their own tails intent  
your peacocks parade  
down a lichened balustrade.

Perennial flowers unfold  
hearing the grit of your feet  
on this gravel path.  
Your gardeners are very wise and old.  
But your villas' vaulted rooms' array  
and your crocuses and stocks  
are an aftermath  
of long ago and far-away  
that keeps you alive while it mocks.  
A warm wind rocks your fountain's jet  
yet you grow cold.

Weary people of parchment  
with an eye, ringed round with wrinkles,  
that twinkles  
malicious hunger with itself at strife,  
once did it make your heart leap,  
this unfading beauty—  
once, when you paid for it with a sigh  
and turned your back on life,  
once, before years into many years had slipped  
by irretraceable degrees?

You have made your nest  
in the remorseless eternity of beauty.

I . . .

Ah, the seeds of a dream's perpetuity  
are too cheap  
in Italy  
for me.

## QUINCE BLOSSOMS

OUT of your leafless stem,  
    five-petaled quince,  
your pistil a pearl,  
your stamens a little yellow sheaf,  
burst in perfection now the night  
that disimprisons you  
comes.

I am weary of men and their folly  
and of my own folly,  
and my days are empty of elation,  
and my thoughts—I wince at them  
remembering them.

Ah, but pure the delight  
with which I curl  
the caress of my eyes  
around your clusters,  
flower sudden as revelation  
and unearthly  
as second sight.

## LIGHT

**L**IKE a runner running over a starlit plain  
breathless, with clenched hands, wildly,  
for fear of the sardonic quietness  
of the stars,  
when the wasted hills settling down into their deep  
composure  
whisper to one another, under the slow rotation of the sky,  
when the still night air is cold in his mouth. . . .

Take not away from me, in my breathless running  
through the darkness with clenched fingers and bruised  
feet—  
take not from me, you smiling and scornful immensities,  
the agonizing light behind my blind eyes—  
take not away from me flight.

Look! I am only a crazed runner  
running over a starlit plain  
wildly, aimlessly, with the cold of death in my mouth,  
running, running breathless through my own mania  
for fear of the sardonic quietness  
of your eternal stars.

**E**VERYWHERE there is something hanging by a  
 thread  
 all over the world:  
 bits of loose plaster caught,  
 twisting with the wind in spiders' webs,  
 high up on scaling old walls;  
 fruit, leaves, and seeds that would slip from their dry stems  
 in the faintest stir of this deep-sleeping Autumn air;  
 old houses that would crumble  
 if you let a window slam;  
 old ships that would sink  
 if a tired sea-gull lighted on their rail;  
 cliffs that a beetle's pincers, nipping a spear of grass,  
 would topple over into peaceful valleys;  
 avalanches that wait to rumble down  
 only the melting of one point  
 of one snowflake's crushed six-pointed star;  
 bodies, stiffening with death's stoniness,  
 held up on a will to live  
 over the grave;  
 dead ideas, like stuffed birds on a rusty wire,  
 all dust and rumpled feathers,  
 still turning in some draughty hallway of the mind,  
 simulating flight;  
 the earth itself still counterpoised  
 on its own dying spinning  
 in space—  
 all that absolving time in its hurry overlooks  
 everywhere lifelessly clinging to life,  
 in the midst of death's  
 universal tender loosening into peace.

## ONCE MORE THE PATHETIQUE

I LISTENED again, after years, to music  
that once like a sea wind  
blew clean the summits of my mind.

I listened,  
cloudy with seasons of Himalayan mists  
sticking to the roof of my world,  
and oh so much more than ever  
in need of that revelation.

But, wedged in among hundreds of faces,  
rows on thick expectant rows of them,  
I became a stone-cold Laocoön  
crawled over by the coiling and uncoiling  
of scaly sounds.

Some one other than myself used my eyes to watch the  
conductor sweat.  
Some one other than myself was sickened by the breath  
of a much-moved woman behind me.

And I ran up through an interminable black tunnel  
towards a tiny vent-hole of light.

Curses on the multiplication table!

## QUERY TO THE LORD OF LIGHT

DAINICHI, your hands clasped  
in the gesture of the union  
of mortality with the infinite,  
making the symbol of the five senses  
closing upon wisdom  
clearer than the heart of a diamond. . . .

Dainichi, light of the world,  
the gilt flakes off  
your golden body;  
flake by flake it chips off  
and falls into the stone-rimmed pool  
below your altar.

And the gold fish wake out of their cold dreams;  
they think they see the wings of a dead butterfly;  
they dart upon them like streaks of sunlight;  
they fight about the flakes  
of the bright body  
of your immeasurable wisdom;  
and their churning tails  
leave tiny eddies and ripples  
on the pool.

O Illuminator,  
how comes the phantom of hunger  
to lurk so untamed in the shadow of your light?



## THE EXPLORER

**H**IS brittle hands let a pale rosiness  
through from the fire as he passed them over his  
white beard,  
and the skin on his skull  
over a puckered bushiness of brows  
brought back to me the feeling of an ivory  
I have often had in my hands—a stained figure  
of a Christ caressed by who will ever say  
how many lips.

So when he told me how he explored alone  
Lake Nyassa a long, long lifetime ago,  
scaling the snow-capped chain of Marununga's peaks  
that stand around it  
and plunge toothed shadows  
into the sun-devoured gold  
of its rippleless immensity,  
I no longer felt he was sitting there,  
fragile and old beside me.  
I only heard his quiet voice.

And through my mind  
lithe black men, nude, bronze-glossy, full of held-in  
swiftness,  
crawled on all fours, with big white watchful eyes,  
through mango thickets,  
beyond Ayanga and Makanga,  
serpent-wise, in fear of cruel gods,  
cruel chiefs, cruel enemies.  
And deep behind my eyes  
clusters of blooms, obscenely poisonous,  
hung from a woven dome of mulando boughs,  
strangled and stifling with the stench of decay.

I saw blue-faced baboons with scarlet buttocks  
and lecherous tails  
slinking through silver reeds

in the heron-haunted Morambala marshes;  
and luridly, through the listless air—  
green, red, black, yellow, strident streaks they seemed—  
great birds  
screamed over me, settling like gossamer  
down the livid half-light  
on gorgeous, unfluttered, outspread plumes.  
I felt the crushing sun's heat  
on a thatch of swamp-fattened leaves,  
while the jungle snapped and shivered  
at something squirming its way  
down to the molten gold of the lake.

And through it all I kept hearing drums of ebony beating  
through a steady throb of beaten drums beating  
through a thick, ecstatic pulse of deeper drums,  
while an unsteady flute  
spilled, like a rivulet of sulphur creeping through the dark,  
a trickle of gasping melody  
that turned upon itself and coiled and suddenly set free  
a shuffling of soft feet  
and wriggle of bare flesh  
and jiggle of black breasts  
in rites more ancient than the jungle is.

Till on the tum-tum, tum-tum-tum,  
and unending flicker of the flute  
I felt the jeweled pinion of my brain,  
on which my thoughts revolve,  
spin into giddiness.

For there was something, behind me, beside me, above me,  
so soaked and soaked again and steaming  
with life,

something so dark and teeming with existence  
that the naked black men's naked fear  
put its damp fingers into my heart. . . .

Then looking up I saw him stroking in a revery  
his white beard  
and speaking like one who has forgotten that he speaks.

## TO THE DISEMBODIED INTELLIGENCE

O H quickly  
out of your polar seclusion  
where, by spinning on your heel scornfully,  
you have often reversed the motion of the stars . . .  
quickly—  
this cane-brake is swarming with lascivious pigmies.

I have known in what nothingness consists.  
Obliterate my apartness  
in the benediction  
of your basilisk eyes.

There can be between us now  
no side considerations,  
no vicious charity.  
What if once I did stupidly think  
there was a secret kinship  
between myself  
and forgotten idols?

## A SPRING SONG FOR CALIFORNIA

A TOMTIT'S cheep, addressed  
to the gurgle of the creek,  
flits sharp as a little crotchet's hook  
jotted carelessly oblique  
in a new blank-book.  
This season's pullets have begun to sit.  
The gruntings of a saxophone  
intone with unregarding glee  
someone's opulent vacuity  
too long suppressed.  
A punted football's twirls  
loop up and droop  
into a crook'd arm.  
The sunshine is blue as an arc light,  
and the swirls of the hill's edge through it  
delight  
even me.

Now moment after moment limpidly laps against me  
like a warm ripple and yields  
gayly  
its tether on eternity  
to another.  
A violent cyclamen stares  
in a red pot.  
The marble clouds pile up  
and file away behind the trees  
complacently.  
The rains have passed  
like naked girls  
running at dawn over fallow fields.  
The ground is soft as a cheese to spade  
and bursting buds shake a cannonade  
over ants gone mad on their army affairs,  
while local architects swing and smile  
in swivel chairs.

## GRAMOPHONE SOLO

**F**INGERING a tune on my clarionet  
I burned a village of wooden shacks—  
these melodious attacks  
are more insidious than they seem.

Yet people look for lightning in their music—  
the flash that will short-circuit their emotions  
through me!  
Then they go shouting, "Firebug! Firebug!"

Engine of our inspiration  
(And how like a thing beset  
it spins  
fearfully;  
look, and the spark of it  
how it skims and skips!),  
engine, before your hum  
acts like a drug  
and still more mixed our metaphors become,  
intimate, intimate to me  
what makes you make me squeeze a melody  
through the tube of a clarionet  
and hold it like elixir to their lips  
when where it drips it burns—  
since fire is the liquid of the voice of any bird  
and crematory to the common herd?

. VERSUS .

## ELECTION Day.

**E** The sky-blue plumbago basks, a motionless wave of bloom, under this dry exhilarating California sun.

Ford cars, buzzing like clocks  
that have lost their balance-wheels,  
deliver eggplants,  
polished and purple,  
and white ranch eggs stuck in cardboard pigeon-holes.  
A gramophone grits its teeth over a jazz.  
Crack!

**They are playing baseball in the lot next door.**

## Election Day!

And which shape of straw  
will the befuddled giant choose this time  
to jiggle on jocose thumb at his puppet-show,  
while Europe, in her dotage,  
looks up, incredulous, lacrymose.  
expecting—

**surely not another Messiah!**

## Election Day.

My newspaper crinkles and smells like a sawmill as, open-mouthed, I skim over the last exhortations of frantic and unselfish candidates.

# Crack!

They are playing ball in the lot next door—  
“Yea-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-y”

**Surely not already the Messiah!**

The plumbago basks in the still sun,  
scentless and sky-blue.

## A STYLIST

**S**ELF-SUFFICIENT and shut in upon myself  
I thought I could hold words on to the grindstone  
of my imagination,  
so firm, so long,  
that with the fine edge of their subtlety  
I could, when the moment came,  
chip imperishable figures  
out of the unquarried ledges of my life.

How many years have been sucked up  
into my stone's whirling  
and lost in the gush of its winking sparks!  
How many years—  
while the shapes I was going to chisel  
have faded out of my mind.

Faded completely.  
And now I have it in my hands,  
this whetted instrument,  
what am I to do with it  
hacking and hewing at shadows  
that mocking  
hack and hew at me?

Ouf, the cliff sculptures of Tibet and China!

## REVOLUTIONARIES

TO bring down suddenly and utterly,  
as an earthquake would, the rotting edifice  
where Faith has been walled up in incest with the shadow  
of her fear  
for centuries and centuries,  
to burn the rags of Faith's diseases and her rusty irons  
in a vision's smokeless flame—this was their dream,  
when Thought (who knew the purging of his parents'  
incest  
would make a beggar of him on the public streets)  
in their ear  
whispered a syllable that gave again to their mortal eyes  
a pregnant sight . . .  
while treacherously caressing the wayward flower-flame  
of their vision  
he tore loose from eternity  
the slim deep roots of its light.



## WINDLESS RAIN

**R**AIN at dawn on the tiles of Venice,  
a soft straight steady slipping down of rain:  
water mistily passing into water  
with a diffused hush.  
Not another sound in the city,  
no lapping of waves, no knocking together of boats.  
Everything sleeping.

I look out and watch the rain,  
until the silence of the low misty clouds  
and the silence of the sleeping city,  
and the inner silence into which all my thoughts have been  
sucked up  
cling to one another  
with the chill caressing gesture  
of the Three Graces,  
the delicate Lesbian goddesses  
of the cathedral library of dry Siena.  
I see them projected from the magic lantern of my mind  
against the impalpable unbroken  
background of the rain. . . .

Mesmerizing sound of rain on canal water—  
There is a shadowless beginning of light now  
everywhere;  
but at the corner of Calle Lanza and Calle San Gregorio  
lamplight is yellow still on grey walls.

## CIRCULAR FANS

THE perimeters of the minds of most people,  
how quickly you can measure them!—  
two carved or painted little sticks  
of environment and heredity  
laid face to face,  
and when with the bright smile of an idea  
you open them,  
turning them through their full orbit,  
when carefully laying them back to back  
you fasten the gilt clasp of their prejudice,  
there outspread, the pleated complete circle of their  
intelligence:  
a low moon scratched across by river reeds perhaps;  
a humble doorway into daily tribulations;  
some emblematic holy figure. . . .

Fan yourself!  
How will you ever  
stir otherwise this torpid air?

## BYZANTINE MOSAICS

**G**ESTICULATION and laughter and bombardment  
of flowers  
beside this deep blue sea,  
under this deep sea-blue sky.  
The chattering crowd falls greedily on its moment—  
the living promiscuous crowd living out its living desires.  
It is the feast of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin,  
the compassionate, the interceding.

The swirling frivolity of thousands of faces  
gurgles around me  
lapping into my eyes with bright provocative ripples.  
But, turned in upon myself,  
I remember  
that, in the twilight of crumbling apses,  
I have seen recognition  
in fixed inhuman eyes  
and something invisible to others  
pass over their expression  
as I have gazed up at half-obliterated figures  
tall and very frail and loaded down  
with all the sapphires and emeralds  
of imperial treasures.

Ascetic and cruel and cadaverous women  
cancerous with defeat and an empire's decrepitude,  
insane and exquisite and inquisitive women  
silent with the poison of an impassive voluptuousness  
and full of ruinous understanding,  
we have understood one another  
without intercession or compassion.  
And how should I not be a stranger at flower festivals  
among these children of barbarians,  
when in my mind you linger

enduring without a gesture  
the gleaming functions  
and tedious last rites  
of plague-depopulated capitols?

The obscurity and falling away of dead time  
is bridgeless between us.  
And you will never come back again to this impoverished  
world

where only paltry and tawdry counterfeits,  
like these tinsel village girls made up as queens,  
enthroned while the procession lasts  
from city gate to city gate,  
parade  
in pasteboard cars of triumph.

I have looked into your great fixed eyes  
and seen the end of life like a little light  
floating far-off on the edge of the sea at night.  
You have turned upon yourselves  
and, cold and distracted, you watch  
your erudite and sycophantic priests  
move imperturbable through yet another incense-stifled  
cycle

of senseless ritual,  
while Scythians and Bulgarians  
paw at the gates.

O frail and pitiless and aching  
under your crushing,  
gem-encrusted tunics,  
we have understood one another;  
we are heavy and helpless with understanding.

And yet a worm of envy works his file-like tongue  
on the quick of me.

To feel my heart flutter up  
with exaltation like a peasant boy's

watching his love as queen of the festival  
ride by  
billyow with mosquito net  
and drawn by plodding plough horses!  
Or to jeer and be full of the joy of jeering  
familiar, thoughtless, unwounding,  
like these village people  
when she kisses her hands at them  
with the jerky movement of a manikin.

## POSTPONEMENT

**T**HROUGH the rock crystal of my silence  
run silver flaws;  
unsung songs beating against it  
have cracked with fine fissures the globe of my silence,  
and the knife-thin ray of inner light  
with which I probe into the future  
splinters along them into ghostly spectra.

If only I had put out my hand  
when they flew hard into the deceiving crystal,  
as bewildered birds fly into the light,  
I should not now, in this darkness,  
be wrapped and wrapped,  
like an unrisen Lazarus,  
in all these swathing ribbons of rainbows.

## PEACE

COME, my own, let us steep ourselves in beauty,  
for in the world no sacrifice avails,  
no purity avails or holiness.

They walked in the flame of death as into sunlight,  
and they made themselves for others the inner flame of  
life—

they are dead and the names of them, who will remember?

They have fallen among obscene shadows that have  
quenched

the burning of their vision,

shadows piled up, ages deep, by dead lust, dead greed,

around them dead and around us living,

shadows full of insatiable teeth and padded paws that  
prowl,

betrayals, trafficking, plottings, money-changing.

The beasts of the thickets of money and power—

they have bartered the ashes of their bones,

they have sold their unnameable martyrdom and passion,

they have traded in the divine trance of their utter devotion,

they have made of their death a trap with which to way-  
lay us.

Come, my own, let us steep ourselves in beauty,

for it alone has in it no root of corruption,

for it alone is consolation;

be it only the resonance fallen mysteriously on a word,

the morning's unfolding

or the night's restoring transfigurations,

the laughter of a child, the singing of a bird, the quiver of  
a leaf—

be it only this tragic and imprisoned and tumultuous  
heart of yours,

or be it only now at last,

only the tender gesture of understanding,  
long lacking,  
with which I look into your mind,  
and you look deep down into mine and bring me peace.



## SUBURBAN TWILIGHT

**I**NTO the thickening dusk  
I carried the dusk of my alien mind.  
Silence congealed on the cement sidewalks  
speculators have scratched across empty fields.  
Here and there a human fly  
buzzed in a ready-made house.

The sign posts were as meaningless and askew  
as my thoughts—  
“Paradise Point, Tract P 3, Panoramic Way.”

This, I said, is an iniquity of drawing paper and India ink,  
a calculation,  
a diagram,  
a zoölogical garden of logic and lust.

The silence was like a blue jelly  
and, as I walked, it quivered into a blear piping,  
a shrill throbbing.

It was as if all the memories of my childhood  
sitting around the puddle of unconsciousness,  
began whimpering.

I listened, thinking to myself, “At least there still are  
frogs.”

Then I passed a popcorn peddler’s cart,  
and the little whisk of steam from his whistle,  
spiffing drearily,  
blew away white into the unlighted night.

## ANNOUNCING A DISSOLUTION SALE

“**BEATITUDE.**

This article goes to the bargain counter  
Friday.

A limited supply from our own agent  
in the Elysian Fields.

Assorted. Guaranteed. First come, first served.

No orders C. O. D. will be received.

100,000,000 samples have been sold.

The price is right and cut down to the quick.

Sacrifice!

These goods for while they last.

Our motto-monogram on every package:

‘To him that hath.’

Shop early. Bring your friends.”

(Galvanic arms and hands

knock over the salesmen

waving paper money

sticky with sweat and blood.

The cash register chokes.)

I put my face against the plate-glass door,  
but seeing the exaltation of the mob

I saunter to a graveyard that I know

to hum love-songs and study epitaphs,

(This form of piety repays a rhetorician.)

while dandelions, sprinkled through the grass,

make mimic maps

of prehistoric heavens.

## COSTA SCARPUCCIA

**T**HROUGH the lit mist  
that flows low under the night sky  
like a silver dust-cloud over the city,  
nine orange lights on an unseen hill—  
nine orange street lamps of Fiesole  
alive with a faint twinkling in the black stillness  
mimicking the constellation of Cassiopeia setting.

I carry my mind like a falcon asleep on my wrist,  
and it does not peel the thin wrinkled skin from its  
eye

as I wander down the steep flagged gorge of this silent  
old street.

Like a falcon chained with a fine gold chain  
my mind sleeps, drooping its predatory wings.

And, fearless of startling it into flight,  
I look up and see  
all the thoughts and desires, like my own, that have made  
men make the city,  
hewing it, year in year out, day in day out, with weary  
chisels  
out of cold stones,  
carving it slowly in the image of their fate  
enfeoffed to the cruel wings of their dreams.

I look up and see,  
under the nine far-away orange street lamps of Fiesole  
laid against the hill like Cassiopeia setting,  
the everliving races of the birds of divination and  
hope  
where they sit in a brooding rookery  
on the edge of shadows that hang from jutting roofs  
of banks, shops, bureaus, hotels, houses—  
bald, old vultures with hunched-up, shoulder bones,  
and hoary, bedraggled owls,

and ruffled, river-haunting cranes—  
their claws clenched tight on rain-smoothed cornice gutters,  
their beaks thrust under their wings.

I look up and see them  
and my falcon mind sinks its talons deep into my wrist.

## REQUIEM

The birth of an essentially American art is momentarily expected.—Radio Broadcast.

LARVA in a steel-blue crevice  
under hills of ice,  
strange speck-embodied pain of coming wings too delicate  
for flight,  
insect,  
why are you trying to be born  
in this Switzerland not garnished yet  
with lepidopterists?

I see by your feeble pulsations  
you feel a lost ray of the sun  
come crawling  
over the glacier of recorded fact.  
Ah, but will nothing  
reverse the useless cycle of your fated becoming?

This shadowy dawn is fallacious.

Already as a worm  
(much less as painted death-moth  
or ghostly dragon-moth)  
you are too . . . old!

## OTHERNESS

**I**T is so silent here I cannot think.  
An oak leaf's clicking fall  
denudes my mind of continuity;  
and the ringlet waves of putting  
the twos and twos of life together  
lap backwards over one another  
and die out into this silence  
like a wind's breath  
held in over a pool.  
I see the crooked image of a bough,  
the flickering of a butterfly;  
and bending nearer over myself  
I put my face down  
and feel the chill of otherness  
creep over my eyes.

## TO A BIVALVE

CREATURE of accretions,  
at noon, under the sea water's pale-green half night,  
half day,  
grain by grain  
you are making for yourself a wall of rainbows  
secretly out of the dark, swaying sea.  
Yet what can you know of fabulous signs and promises  
arched red, purple, blue,  
binding sudden rifts of serene sky  
to the scudding foam—  
you, when the foot of their arch is set on the edges of the  
world,  
you  
—bubbles,  
a little, wobbling, up-striving stream  
black over, silver under,  
the breadth of your mouth?

Turn inward your dreams, O my spirit.  
Let the inside even of your rebellion be a rainbow  
better to you than many-colored, far-away,  
false hopes.

Look, these millions of upturned faces  
distorted with anguish  
—waiting for the miracle!  
Look, these millions of fixed eyes  
ashen with disillusion!

## MARIONETTES

AT the sun-silvered far end of the empty square,  
their backs to me, they walk side by side,  
shoulders and hips just touching;  
they are both in black,  
and her slanted bright parasol  
covers their inclined heads  
like a little green dome.

I see them stop,  
and his arm, extended in its black sleeve  
ending in a white hand,  
makes twice  
a gesture, an appeal.

They walk on again  
crossing a blue polygon of shadow  
fallen askew from the grey corroded front  
of an ancient church.  
They loiter  
where the joints of the flags of the sun-silvered square  
converge.

I do not know who they are,  
and from my window they seem now  
hardly an inch high.  
Yet in the clear depths of my introspection  
I see, sharp from their feet, diverging beyond them  
far out, year behind year,  
a crowded perspective  
interpenetrating like a diorama  
the sunny walls of the old square's houses.

Something has dropped out of eternity into time.

And I feel the shimmering waters of their trance  
suck me under



into a stillness where the stars are lit at midday.  
They saunter on again.  
No wonder her tilted parasol  
is shot with the dye  
of spring's unfolding tenderest leaves.

## WORDS

FROM high up among interwoven branches  
that make black rivers against my mind's moonlight,  
words let go of their chilled twigs  
and spinning drift downward  
through the inner stillness of my meditation.

And they are miraculous words  
like the words of incantations.

What can they ever be to me these heaps of leaves  
the keepers of gardens and graves  
have raked up crinkling beside the crowded highway?

Would I be a wind to blow them into the pitiable faces  
of hurrying travelers?  
Would I stoop with the flame of a match to set them  
smouldering  
for the sake of the blue-white column of smoke  
rooted in their decay and twisting like a waterspout  
into the clouds?

Would I dim the eyes of those who do not see  
the end of their journey  
with the gusty eddies and rustle of prophecy?  
Would I deceive these crawling convoys creaking through  
the desert  
from one bondage into another  
with a pillar of smoke?

The flash and hurrying clamor of the highway;  
the unceasing rumble of its wheels;  
the unresting pattering and shuffle of feet;  
and out of the moonlit silver plains and black rivers of  
my mind,  
sifting downward through the sacred stillness  
of my meditation,  
magic unavailing words.















YC 106445

863756

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY

